

6

E. SAINTE-MARIE PERRIN

PRESENT DAY LIFE
IN ALSACE

Both Within and Beyond our Lines





E. SAINTE-MARIE PERRIN

PRESENT DAY LIFE IN ALSACE

Both Within and Beyond our Lines



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2015

<https://archive.org/details/presentdaylifein00sain>

Present Day Life in Alsace

BOTH WITHIN AND BEYOND OUR LINES

As set forth at the time by the *Strassburger Post* in its issue of June 30th 1917, a « tour of inspection for neutral journalists » was organised in Alsace-Lorraine by a German propaganda bureau, with a view to bringing home to them, not by mere verbal demonstration, but by what the paper is pleased to describe as « a simple object lesson », how true it is that Alsace and Lorraine — denominated *Reichsland* by their present masters — were in the beginning, are now, and ever will be German land, a morsel of German flesh and blood... Eight highly privileged newspaper writers were selected for the occasion. Unfortunately, and to the great chagrin, no doubt, of the German authorities, who fully appreciate the fact that American opinion carries weight, the time was no longer when American journalists were available. So for want of better, the party was made up of three Dutch subjects (one of them a woman), a Swiss, three Swedes and a Norwegian. They were taken to Strasbourg and to Metz, they were shown over the Haut-Kœnigsbourg, Ribeauvillé, Niederbronn, Haguenau, Saverne, and the Hoh-Barr. In the course of their wanderings, a number of réceptions were got up in their honour, so as to put them in touch with people representative of the land. But as it would not be very easy to find many Alsatians willing to « represent » the country in a manner consistent with German ideas, or in other words to go into raptures over *Deutschum*, as exemplified in the annexed provinces, it was considered advi-

sable to send out « only a small number of invitations » to make sure, it may be assumed, of having none but reliable guests. Perhaps indeed — who can tell? — the company even included a few Germans. It was made up, if the *Post* is to be believed, of « Old-Alsatians » belonging both to the Protestant and to the Roman Catholic persuasion. The feasts were marked by great cordiality, the fare comparatively sumptuous, for all the « stern limitations imposed by a state of war », but then, observes the writer, « Alsace has ever been famed for her hospitality ». There was a great banquet at Strasbourg, where the town Mayor entertained his guests at an evening party; at Metz they were treated to an address by Senator Grégoire; the function at the Hoh-Barr were attended « in his private capacity » by no less a personage than « Privy Councillor » Dr. Hoeffel, President of the Upper Chamber of the Landtag. The eight neutral journalists were received right royally.

The occasion, indeed, warranted as much. For as the *Strassburger Post* judiciously remarks, « such a visit might very well be productive of important results. Which is not to say, the article hastens to add, that any immediate effect should be expected therefrom as regards the trend of world politics. »

The visitors, however, were all agape with admiration. « From the lofty summits of the Haut-Kœnigsbourg and the Hoh-Barr, their eyes wandered over the flourishing plain... » Here let us pause awhile. For the first time, indeed, the dull recital is flavoured with a spice of truth. Yea, verily, as viewed from those heights, the broad acres stretching away in the sunlight as far as the Rhine are a marvellous sight. One is entranced by the smiling, fruitful aspect of that endless golden plain. Alsace is a land of beauty, of this we did not need to be reminded by the enemy. Yet if France was alive to the fact, our neighbours in neutral countries would not appear to have shared that knowledge. According to the *Strassburger Post*, « the journalists remarked that Alsace-Lorraine

is but very little known in Europe, and even in the greater part of Germany ». So under the guidanee of « speialists », who pointed out to their admiration the monuments of the present and bygone ages and afforded them plentiful opportunities of « initiating humane friendships » with the guests summoned to the Alsatian junketings, the eight neutral journalists obediently repeated the burden of the song dinned into their ears at every turn : « This is German land ! This is German land ! »

This « object lesson » however, it was thought necessary to supplement by a few words of explanation, for the German is a born pedagogue. In toasts, in farewell speeches, in a formal address, at private receptions, the neutral journalists had it well rubbed into them that « ethnographieally and historieally », these western marches are German to the core, so that these gentlemen — to say nothing of the lady — might once and for ever, in the Press to which they are accredited, « lay the preposterous ghost of an Alsace-Lorraine alleged to be two provincies filehed from France. »

As may well be imagined, it would never have done to call in just anybody to bear witness in favour of Germany. But there are to be found in Alsace a certain number of « ralliés » people won over to German institutions, whom their material interests, or personal feelings of sympathy, have led to aeeept the accomplished fact, and who have reeeived from Germany as a reward honours, favours and all manner of facilities. Senator Grégoire, a native of Lorraine whose speech was telegraphed to every German newspaper, vaunted the eonomic prosperity of that provinee under the German rule, and the impetus given to its industry. He went so far as to deelare that it would never oecur to any of these fortunate individuals to « desire a change in sueh advantageous eonditions. »

Presently, an Alsatian poet, Lienhard, delivered himself of a sort of historical and sentimental homily. Friedrieh Lienhard is one of the few Alsatians, out of a population of two million souls, who would have undertaken sueh a task. For if there are people in Alsace and Lorraine won over by personal

interest or considerations of policy, few indeed are those who are guided by sentimental reasons. But the Germans were only too pleased to be able to exhibit that rare specimen, a successful product of their germanising effort. Lienhard, first a *pasteur*, of whom his countrymen speak more in sorrow than in anger as having been led by a sort of perverted vocation to become a servant of the German *Gott*, was educated at the *Gymnasium* of Bouxwiller. Here the Germans had established a centre for that aggressive, proselytising system they denominate *Kultur*, and upon this misguided weakling, whose brain apparently was not of the usual sound Alsatian texture, the German illumination took effect. He is a convert to Germany and to all things German. He declared to the journalists that he « loves German Kultur with all his heart. »

« Highly honoured guests, he began, allow me as an Alsatian to bid you welcome to this our western German march. You have been requested to come here so that you may see with your own eyes that Alsace and Lorraine have been German from the first. You will be able to convince yourselves, in conversing with us, that we have no hatred for our neighbours beyond the Vosges. On the other hand we are possessed with the immutable conviction that we are part and parcel of Germany. We come from the Germanic stock of the Franks and Alamans, who had settled in these parts even before the great migrations » (All this sounds rather vague to us, but the neutral journalists seemed to be satisfied with it.)

After thus sketching out the past history of Alsace, he proceeded :

« We are a German country. We are by no means oppressed. We have been given universal suffrage for the election by ballot of our representatives in Parliament and on the communal Councils. It is sheer nonsense to pretend that we want to be set free. Not another drop of blood must be shed on our account !

« That many of us — myself included — are bound to France by ties of relationship is only natural in the case of a border country, and so it will appear to all who are acquainted with the history of our Western march. But the fundamental fact remains that we are a German land, and the fact will be brought home to you, in the atmosphere of our towns and villages, of our feudal castles, of our mountains, valleys and rivers. More than 80 per cent of the population speak German ; most of them are ignorant of French and converse in the Franco-Alamanic dialect ; the linguistic boundary does not follow the Rhine, but the

chain of the Southern and Middle Vosges, eventually curving back in a narrow belt towards Lorraine.

We will endeavour to inspire you with sympathy for our country and for our people. And for this you can requite us in no better way (if such be your desire), than by helping us to destroy, root and branch, a notion so contrary to the teaching of history, as that representing Alsace and Lorraine to be two provinces stolen from France. »

After listening to such assertions, how could impartial men fail to be convinced? Carefully hedged about by the poet, the mayor, the senator, the privy councillor, and a few other body-guards of minor degree, they had no chance of questioning at random the people they met in the streets, or along the roads, and who stared with no little curiosity at these strangers so ceremoniously attended. None the less did they duly keep on repeating with much wagging of their heads under their excursionist's hats (for with these they were no doubt presented, if so be that there still remains any of that lovely green felt in Germany!) « This is German land ! this is German land ! »

I have made a point of quoting in full, just as it has been described to us by a German newspaper this « demonstration of Germanised Alsace », got up for the benefit of neutral countries. All the advantages claimed for the system were set out in full. We have seen that the trip was prepared and carried out with the greatest care, that the occasion was held to be an important one ; we may assume, therefore, that what was shown to these neutrals and what was said to them, was the sum total of the arguments and illustrations adduced by Germany to prove the essentially German character of Alsace and Lorraine. We have touched, as it were, all her claims, all her artful quibbles.

And it all comes to this ! The Rhenish affinity of a few monuments, a bald and arbitrary interpretation of history, the linguistic argument, and with regard to the present time, the mere dogmatic pronouncements of a few solitary Alsatians, banging the table and declaring that they are and wish to remain German.

After all, what does it amount to, what is the value attaching to these German « demonstrations ? »

They are theories, and nothing more.

Again if we turn to the other side of the question, and consider not mere words but sober realities, not artificial doctrines, but the actual deep-rooted human drama, we are confronted with such a superabundance of deeds and facts that we are at pains to make a selection, for they all thrust themselves upon one's memory and vision, like a vast crowd, thrilled by a common purpose. With the outstanding historical facts everybody is acquainted. But the facts I wish to mention, whether public and obvious, or obscure and unknown, belong to the present, to the time of this very war. They are of so spontaneous a nature, human so withal, that everything else appears by comparison stale, flat and unprofitable.

When I call to mind the picture of Alsace-Lorraine, divided as it is to-day, my first thought is ever of a small but significant incident that was related to me by an officer who had witnessed the scene with his own eyes. This I will mention first, therefore, because just as it haunts me constantly, so it may impress the imagination of others.

It was in the spring of 1916. The war had already lasted a year and a half. A German aeroplane was brought down at Verdun, and fell to earth within the French lines, under conditions making it perfectly clear that its two occupants must be either dying or dead.

A few soldiers and an officer-interpreter — the very man who told me the tale — hastened to the spot. Half buried under the remains of the machine they found the observing officer, who had breathed his last, and the pilot, a common soldier, with his limbs broken, but still alive.

One of our soldiers bent over him and on his identity disc, he read the man's name and his birthplace. Ruprechtsau. Now Ruprechtsau is the German form of Robertsau, a suburb of Strasbourg. The French soldier who had examined the pilot was an Alsatian ; and no sooner had he read the inscrip-

tion, than he shook the dying man, regardless of his wounds, compelled his attention, and said to him angrily in the Alsatian dialect :

« What ! you belong to Robertsau and you are here ! »

Which was as much as to say « You, an Alsatian, have been fighting against the French ! »

The man opened his eyes and looked at the speaker ; under the moral agony superadded to his physical pain, he broke down completely, the tears sprang from his staring eyes. Then he answered — and the officer who heard him told me he should never forget the tragic tones of the reply :

« I could not do otherwise ».

They cannot do otherwise !

It is easy to guess that in the question of military service centres the whole Alsatian drama. Under which flag shall that duty be performed ? For all his French leanings, a young Alsatian is a German subject ; his military service is claimed by Germany. If he evades that obligation, he becomes a deserter. And the Germans have aggravated by confiscation the usual penalty for this heinous crime. Every Alsatian, whether actually called up or liable for service, who crosses the frontier, is struck off the roll of German citizens and all or part of his property is forfeit to the Empire (1).

« If you only knew, an Alsatian mother once said to me, how hard it is, when a son is born to you, to do nothing but think : shall he stop in Alsace when he is old enough to serve, or must to give up everything and cross over to France ? One has ties, interests, duties, all manner of things that bind one. We Alsatians, are passionately attached to our native land. Our hearts were wrung, I can assure you, as we watched our lads grow up ! »

And now, all the terrors underlying that secret anguish have materialised. What reason was there for a young Alsatian to hate the idea of serving in the German army ? It was that

(1) As the delinquent is sentenced to a fine which he cannot pay, being abroad, the government seize his or his family's property as ' security '.

some day he might be called upon to fight against the French. And lo ! that day has dawned.

In peace time, the problem was solved by the ceaseless tide of emigration that flowed from Alsace and Lorraine to France between 1870 and 1914, bringing to our country, every year, individuals and families that could no longer brook the German domination. It is estimated that some 230.000 people thus came to France, during that period.

Now when war broke out, the problem could no longer be solved by merely « moving out », but only by the momentous act of desertion. An Alsatian soldier incorporated in the German army must be prepared to face the worst, if he wishes to gratify the imperious instinct urging him to join his real brothers. He must break away from his fellow-soldiers, and either attempt to reach the French lines in the course of an attack, or try and escape over the Swiss border and so across neutral territory to France. Such ventures are attended by very real risks !

The « blood tax » — as war service is called in France — appeals to a man's heart. It is borne in upon every man worthy of the name that he must be willing to sacrifice his prospects and if needs be his life for the sake of his country ; but how heavy is that tax when levied by an alien land! Again, what words could be more eloquent than the act by which a man deliberately sets aside his obligations to a country he does not recognise as his own, in order to offer himself freely to another? What election can be compared with such a deed? What protest can have the same significance? From what an irrepressible source must not such a determination have sprung ?

The Alsatians do not feel at home in the German army, nor are they treated in it like Germans, and even while consenting to serve Germany, they still cherish a family feeling that makes them reluctant to killing Frenchmen.

Such are the usual motives by which they are led to desert. Since the month of August 1914 some 16.000 Alsatians or Lor-

rainers serving in the German ranks have come over either singly or in groups, to join the French army. Within the space of four days, from May 1st. to May 4th, 1916, the *Strasbourg News* recorded 51 cases of desertion. And these figures, which are official, and printed in German papers, do not include the Alsatians who had chosen to remain French subjects after the war of 1870 and had enlisted in the ranks of our army, nor the fugitives who had gone to live in France, in Russia, or in neutral countries. These would aggregate about 24,000 — all men who have evaded the German military service. Nor will the number ever be known of those who made the attempt, but were unable to carry it through.

Let us listen to the words of one of these young deserters : a simple tale, and simply told. Alsatians are not given to fine phrases ; tragic situations do not call for heroics, and these men are in the habit of deliberately ignoring what wrings their hearts. We shall see moreover, that their feelings are reasoned out, which lends all the more weight to their decisions.

I was given my first furlough in the spring of 1914. When I reached home (a village in the Sundgau which is still in German hands, at the time of writing) I found the whole place in a state of violent excitement, such as I would never have expected (of course no one had dared to write to me on the subject). It was regular hatred. The Germans did not behave as they do when at home, but as if they were in a conquered country : fines and imprisonment for the merest trifles ; they ordered the crops to be given up to them ; they threatened people right and left. Then it was that I first felt the truth of what the soldiers in Baden used to say : « The Alsatians are French through and through » (*Stockfranzosen*).

The second time I came home on leave, thoughts had travelled apace. There seemed to be less open violence, not that people hated the Germans less, but they were no longer surprised at anything. They expected the worst and bowed to the inevitable. But they were now quite sure the Germans would be beaten. My people at home realised this sooner than we did at the front. My brothers, who had been sent to Eastern Prussia, wrote to say they were kept short of food. My father said to me : « The French will not even require to gain a victory ; the Germans will be obliged to fall back across the Rhine of their own accord. »

The day before I left, he talked to me privately and said : « One day the French will come here again, that is a certainty. I cannot

bear to think of your fighting against them ; they are your future comrades. » I answered : « You know how it will go with you if I desert. Your house will be taken. As likely as not you will be deported to Germany. My brothers will no longer be allowed to come home on leave, and there will be trouble for them in their regiment. » All that day I thought the matter over. For one thing I did not speak French, and I had been told that in France, an Alsatian knowing only his own dialect is exposed to all sorts of insults, that he is constantly being called a German. I was not able to make up my mind, so I went back to duty.

I often talked about this with my Alsatian comrades. They thought just as I did, and when they came back from furlough, they all brought the same impression with them. The Germans were simply hated and every one was sure that Alsace would become French again. *I never met a single Alsatian who did not long to desert*, and for the most part they were only kept from doing so by fear of the trouble they would bring down upon their families. For another thing, it is not an easy matter, it is almost impossible to go beyond the lines without being seen, and when you come near the French positions you are practically certain to be shot ; several of our fellows were killed like that.

The third time I went home on leave, at the end of March 1917, I was sickened with the havoc I had seen wrought in the French departments by the men of neighbouring units. This time I told my mother that I should cross over the border, were it not for the reprisals they would have to endure. All she said was : « That is of no consequence. » When I heard this, my mind was made up, and the same night I said goodbye to my people. I knew beforehand how to set about it to cross the live wires, and I was lucky enough to reach French territory beyond the neutral zone, in safety.

Escape through Switzerland, across the carefully watched barrier of highly charged wire, is perhaps the most dangerous of all. It is the form attempted by men who are dressed in civilian clothes. Men in uniform prefer to escape through the lines, sometimes on the French front, but far more often on the Russian.

A man of restraint and circumspection, living in reconquered Alsace, observed to me :

« If we had known about the war — the coming of which was so effectually concealed by the Germans in Alsace and Lorraine, that we were, so to speak cut off from the rest of the world — if we had known in time, or of it might have been reasonably expected that the French would take Alsace quickly, no one would have joined up. We should have gone into hiding, or across the border. Not one of us would have put on German uniform. »

But how could they have supposed that France would invade Alsace, threatened as she was by the huge German war machine they had seen in the making, and which became ever more powerful, year by year? To them the victory of the Marne appeared even a greater miracle than to us.

« My brother Charles, I was told by a girl belonging to a well-known family of manufacturers in the Mulhouse district, was to leave us on the fourth day, to join his German regiment. During those four days he kept wandering away along the roads, up the hills, to the very top of the mountains, and he sent us on the same errand. With a spy-glass he would keep a look out, as far as the eye could reach, in the direction of the Vosges. He was constantly asking us « Have you seen nothing? Can you see nothing? Are they not coming? » He was boiling over with impatience. But as by the end of the fourth day nothing had happened, he had to go. And the French came the next day but one.

For three months he was on the watch for an opportunity of deserting. One day when his unit was fighting against the English in the North — he was then a sergeant — it so happened that practically all the officers were either killed or wounded, and he remained alone with a hundred and fifty men and one young lieutenant of a weak and hesitating disposition. Being very bold, he managed by alternate persuasion and threats to prevail upon the whole unit to surrender.

This was done accordingly, but many were killed on the way. Ninety seven survivors reached the British lines. My brother was fortunate enough to come across a relative of ours in the French army, and he came to see us here. In all my life, even on the day the French came into the village, I was never more delighted than at seeing Charles wearing that uniform.

— And where is he now?

— He was killed in September 1915, during the Champagne offensive.

ON OUR SIDE OF THE LINES

Who is there but is familiar with the long narrow configuration of Alsace, hedged in on either side by the Vosges and by the Rhine, the pleasing oval of the lowlands between these immutable boundaries, and their green aspect, the colour of a summer apple, or of the sprouting corn in April? An elongated landscape, uniform in character from North to South, between the Rhine on the German side, a silvery line of water fringing the level expanse, and our Vosges on the French side, broad, massive and clad with trees, a blue shadow on the edge of the plain, and the source of its fertility. An attractive, speaking shape, like a delicately modelled human face. The Vosges, an old mountain mass that has sunk and settled down in the course of ages, should have proved a far more effective barrier between Alsace and ourselves than yonder steel thread, the Rhine, between her and Germany. Nothing of the sort. We might, indeed, give some thought to the respective character of these natural boundaries, and the unexpected effects produced by them. Here the mountain range, a very line of cleavage in the ways and customs, in the very mode of speech of the dwellers on either side, yet from a military point of view a purely factitious rampart... There, the river, across which the march of civilisation may sweep unchecked, but to a military expedition nature's strongest and most reliable barrier... Let us refrain, however, from following up these considerations, interesting as they may be, and try to realise how easy of access, how penetrable were the Vosges mountains to our army in August 1914, at the time of its early swoop upon Alsace. From every dip between the hill-tops, from every

pass and mountain track, from the slightest folds whence trickle the new-born springs, our regiments filled with impetuous and over hasty ardour poured from the tree-clad slopes towards the plain, in the headlong rush of down-sweeping waters. Checked here and there, or divided and split up into narrow but ever broadening channels, the tide swept on with all the irresistible might of a young river. On emerging from the shelter of the woods, our men closed up, on the edge of the motionless, alluring southern plain, with Mulhouse in the centre, its lights or smoking chimney tops showing up between the forests of Nonnenbrück and of the Hart, the latter extending as far as the Rhine ; Mulhouse descried by the French soldiers as soon as ever they had reached the crest of the mountains, the first clearing in the woods, the first declivity in the road, where they had pulled down the hateful alien boundary posts.

After varying fortunes, oft related, the arbitrament of battle arrested our troops at the very mouth of those valleys down which they had come. It so happens, therefore, that the portion of Alsace recovered by us, comprises the southern massif of the Vosges, right down to the plain, and far away in the South a patch of that plain itself, a bit of the Sundgau with Dannemarie in the centre. In the Vosges massif held by us, two incurved valleys, two gaps of considerable length, constitute our main possessions. The one, watered by the Doller, ends flush with the plain, at Massevaux ; the other, watered by the Thur, ends at Thann. Though not equal in area, for the Thann valley is both longer and more open than that of Massevaux, their similar conformation — narrow at the outset, then opening out in a graceful curve to enfold two lovely towns — gives each of them the semblance of those fabled horns of plenty, the *cornucopiae* of the ancients, which the artists of the Renaissance were so fond of drawing on either side of their pictures, held slantwise by an unseen hand, and overflowing with fruit and flowers.

The part of Alsace won back to France is divided naturally into three districts : Thann, Massevaux and Dannemarie, the

two former are joined together for administrative purposes and make up the « circle » of Thann. The other « circle » is Dannemarie ; while a general administration, governing the two circles and their subdivisions, has its centre and residence at Massevaux. Dannemarie is of a rural character ; the two valleys are industrial ; in all, this patch of Alsace contains some 60,000 inhabitants, spread over one hundred and twenty communes. It does not take long to visit in a motor-car, and gives one the impression of a small peaceful province, animated, prosperous and satisfied.

Have you ever happened to drop into joyful company, such a host entertaining an unexpected guest ? To feel, by the surrounding atmosphere, by the words spoken and by the very pauses in the conversation, that you have lighted upon one of those favoured mansions that are the abode of perfect content ? No other person is wanted here, neither you, nor any one else ; all that is desired is that no intrusion from the outside world shall disturb the prevailing peace, that present conditions may endure for ever, and the morrow be like unto the day ; that none of the old cares and anxieties shall so much as peep in at the window ; that every door shall remain securely bolted... Thus it is, to-day, in reconquered Alsace ; beyond the disquieting thoughts that are inevitably connected with every war, the life is one of artless gaiety. It may be said that if that part of Alsace still under the German yoke gives proof of its feelings by its sufferings, the nature of those feelings in French Alsace are evidenced by unmixed joy.

— What is Alsace like to-day ? I am asked on my return. What is going on there ? How do the people live ?

My answer is :

« In Alsace ? The tale is soon told. It is just a honeymoon. A honeymoon as between the inhabitants and the authorities, the civilian population and the army. That there may be difficulties, fears, questions to be solved from day-to day, no one will deny. But they are mere passing clouds in a fair heaven soon to be merged in the boundless blue. In the whole

of France, I have seen nothing to compare with this strip of Alsace for smiling cheerfulness.

— May be, replies the sceptical Frenchman... Honeymoons are nothing unusual in the case of young married couples. But how long will it last?

— Excuse me ! It has lasted for three years already. Three years is quite a long time, surely, for any honeymoon to last ?

And should it be objected that the successful results of the experiment in so small a portion of Alsace may not be borne out as regards the whole country, my answer is : why not ? If the Alsatian feeling is at all of a mixed, of an uncertain character, this should be true just as much for that part of the population which the chances of war have caused to become French again from the start, as for those who are still awaiting their deliverance. True, indeed, there is in our part of Alsace no large town. none of those go-ahead and laborious centres that are one of the most striking characteristics of the country, Mulhouse, Colmar, Strasbourg : but what we hold is made, so to speak, of the same stuff as the rest. It is just the same as if we were called upon to examine a small piece of beautiful tapestry, the principal figures of which were not given us to behold : the part in our hands might be the least important, may be a piece of garment, a scroll or leafy pattern, a mere bit of edging : but we could tell what the whole would be like, because both here and further along, the woof would be the same, so too the wool and the design.

With such thoughts as these to hearten us, we may therefore yield unhesitatingly — with none of that thoroughly French fear of being deceived — to the comforting, bracing impression derived from a visit to Alsace. Not a Frenchman who goes there, but must be more or less deeply moved at the sight of that Alsatian joy and thankfulness he hardly dared to contemplate ; but must have borne in upon him, ever deeper day by day, the sweetest and most alluring conviction...

All the sweeter is that conviction for its simplicity. The

Alsatian is out-spoken. He has no use for high-flown talk, and I can hardly imagine how he sets about it when it becomes necessary for him to make pretences. For he is almost aggressive in his sincerity. If he has some unwelcome truth to tell you, out it comes before ever you are seated ; he will unbosom himself on his very doorstep. It is in their every day life, and with no secret desire to make themselves agreeable, that the Alsatians exhibit that serene cheerfulness that has remained unimpaired for over three years.

Our French soldiers are the first to realise the fact.

Generally speaking, the divisions holding the Alsatian front are kept there for some time. It is, generally speaking, a quiet sector, apart from the convulsive struggles on the Hartmannswillerkopf or the Linge, and a few remaining points of constant friction. The hutments are built in tiers, some way back from the lines, on the slopes of the hills, and in the sheltering hollows of the long warm valleys. These are, for our soldiers, the best liked quarters all along the French front (let us be sincere and say the only ones, for home-loving humans have no liking for being disturbed in their habits for three years on end). Here the soldier is received as a friend, a welcome guest, a new-found relative, a promptly adopted son. See that tall artilleryman in his heavy top-boots, leading to school the young hope of the family upon whom he is billeted. This he does every morning, after brewing the coffee for the whole household. But these small attentions are merely a way of showing his gratitude for the hearty welcome afforded him two months ago by his hosts, a welcome so hearty, indeed, as to have been a perfect surprise to him, and one that has suffered no diminution. The mother looks after his clothes, the daughter bakes pastry for him ; they take an interest in all his doings ; they know to a minute when he will come back from the trenches and how pleased he will be to find a fire ready kindled in the earthenware stove, for him to dry his soaking garments.

One such soldier writes to a friend :

“ So you found out that we were in these parts? Talk of a ripping country! The people are as nice and jolly as can be; in fact everything here is simply tip top.

To say I am sorry to have left you, writes a non-commissioned officer who has been sent to the Eastern front, would be putting it mildly. Every man of us — under-officers, officers and gunners alike — agrees with what I have already told you time and again, that never in our lives have we been made more heartily welcome, nor met more delightful people. Allow me to repeat to you once more, between ourselves, that I am one of those who had most to lose when those days spent with you came to an end. Having some knowledge of the language spoken in your parts, I was able to talk with you on a more intimate footing, and felt myself to be so to speak closer to you, almost a fellowcountryman, a native of Alsace, whose love for France is, like yours, rooted in the past: a deep and lasting love which nothing can eradicate... Now it is good-bye to the fresh eggs beaten up in his broth for M. X... when drenched to the skin and numb with cold! Good-bye to the kugelopf, the whortleberry pies, the dough-nuts, and all the rest of the tempting dishes prepared by a charming hostess and perfect cook!

Another writer :

Your little card reminds me of happy moments that were, unfortunately, too good to last. It finds me in the best of health, as well as the rest of us, who join with me in saying that we have not forgotten you. Not that such a thing would be possible, I suppose, for we shall never meet with such kind and lovable hosts. So what more natural than the lively feeling of gratitude we all cherish for you in our hearts.

The following, again, are a few lines written to one of our men by an Alsatian girl, and in which he who runs may read the motives for which such generous hospitality is lavished upon them :

In these few lines, she says, I wish to convey my affectionate regard for you. I love you because you are a Frenchman, and because it is you that are freeing us from the hateful tyrants who have oppressed us for forty-four years. I always pray to God for our brave soldiers and more particularly for you; dear M. X., that he may give you courage and good luck.

Between the Alsatian families and our soldiers all manner of relations spring up — some, no doubt, of an unfortunate character, such as ever result from the billeting of troops upon the civilian population — but for the most part in the nature

of filial or brotherly affection, and occasionally marked by all the subtle delicacy of feeling that is so natural in our French soldiers.

A long correspondence has sometimes been started, aye and kept up religiously for two years and more, between a soldier and some woman, the mistress or the daughter of the house. The latest news of a passing guest who stayed with them at the beginning of the war, will be transmitted from one family to the other. It frequently happens, again, that the women-folk take to writing to each other over the head of the soldier through whom they were first brought into touch with one another, and letters pass to and fro between some remote part of France and this hospitable corner of Alsace. A husband or a son have been treated so kindly that the wife or the mother write to thank the mistress of the house. An infinitely moving correspondence ensues.

Sometimes it is over the dead body of a fallen hero that the bond is knit. Here is a letter written by a tiny maid to the wife of a soldier killed in Alsace. The people there, like every one of essentially French and Latin blood, are respectful of the dead, and the cemeteries in Alsace are carefully tended, both by the inhabitants and by the soldiers.

I am a little Alsatian girl of twelve, writes the child. Dear lady, I want to tell you that I am looking after your husband's grave. He was a regimental cook here, and he was very nice to us. Now he has had to give his life for his country. Dearest lady, you may be sure I will take good care of his grave. Unfortunately his is not the only one. There are eight others I look after...

The people of the villages and small towns — in the valleys even more than in the plain — never fail to hurry up when there are a few soldiers to be seen on the march. The sound of a bugle draws every one to their windows. On hearing some trooper gallop by, the girls will call to each other in the houses : « Who is that ? Come and see ! » At the end of three years, the same keen interest is taken in every movement of our soldiers.

In days gone by, to gratify this taste which all the German parades left unsatisfied, the Alsatians would come in their thousands to witness our reviews on July 14th. Those from the Sundgau would make for Belfort, just as the people of Lorraine went to Nancy. From every part of the plain they wended their way to the old military fortress, by rail, in their carts, on bicycles, on foot. They had managed to secrete some French flag, and as soon as they had crossed the border, out it would come from its hiding-place to deck their conveyance. At Belfort alone, they mustered some thirty or forty thousand strong every year.

I was told the other day by a woman who had come in through Switzerland that « over there » they were compelled, under penalty of a fine, to greet a German regiment with admiring shouts of « There go our men, our brave soldiers ! » Here there is no need of such commands and fines ! Young and old line the roads to watch the smallest detachment go by. Such is the fame of the regimental brass bands that the numbers of the *Chasseur* units who have played there are posted up in the band-stands (to be torn down, occasionally, by jealous rivals in line regiments).

On public holidays, for which an Alsatian would appear to be always ready, the feature most to his liking is the review of the garrison. This he never fails to attend and snapshot eagerly. In every home are to be found endless collections of such military photographs. I was myself present at one of these reviews, in the market square at Saint-Amarin, with its delightful setting of square house-fronts, the public fountain in the foreground and the hills behind ; the very scene, by the way, of Hansi's famous twin picture : « The Village with the Boches », « The Village with the French ». An exhilarating atmosphere of good fellowship pervades and unites the onlookers and the companies sent back for the occasion from the battalion holding the trenches. I likewise attended one of the concerts that are constantly being given to the wounded in the hospitals of the valley, by the troops stationed in the

neighbouring cantonments, nor shall I ever forget either of those clear-cut popular pictures : here the bandsmen drawn up in a semi-circle, with two or three rows of soldiers and civilians behind, while the chord of the arc is formed by a perfectly straight line of spell-bound urchins, their cap on one side, their hands behind their backs, all aglow with admiration...

True it is that a cantonment is a source of wealth for the population. But the Alsatian, with his open-handed generosity, gives away nearly as much as he sells ; he is not one to take advantage of a soldier's necessity. All who have been quartered in reconquered Alsace will tell you that living is cheaper there than anywhere else. And I have shown how readily their hearts are won by our men. The gentry behave to the officers as the workmen and the peasants do to the rank and file. The officer, far away from his home, will spend the late afternoon over a cup of tea or a game of cards, in some cosy drawing-room, where every one is light-hearted ; and the same may be seen every night, in all parts of the country, at dusk, when bright lights and a warm fire are so welcome at the approach of winter.

All the attentions and loving-kindness thus lavished upon the French army are so patent, they afford such irrefutable evidence of the true state of Alsatian feeling, that General de Castelnau observed, when on a recent visit to Alsace : « I only wish every Army Corps in France could be sent here in turn. »

Neither would such a lesson be superfluous. The regiments that fought in Alsace at the beginning of the war met with certain surprises for which, irrationally enough, they bear a lasting guudge against the inhabitants ; they have thus created in the army an all too easily accepted legend. The whole affair is based upon a misunderstanding, and one — it appears to me — that should have been cleared up from the first. What ! Our French regiments march trustingly into the Alsatian towns, where they are welcomed with songs, kisses and wine.

In the evening, or next day, they are shelled copiously, their presence having been notified to the enemy by signals and telephone messages ; they are betrayed at every turn, yet no one troubles to point out to them that the very smallest proportion of Germans in any Alsatian population is 1 to every 4 ; that in some places, such as Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines, that proportion is 3 to 5 ! The misinformed chiefs do not take the elementary precaution of weeding out the population (this was done the second time only) ; and all the while the whole place swarms not only with civilian « immigrants », but with German soldiers and officers in disguise, to say nothing of the officials, forest rangers and policemen ! And since then, who could say how heavily our two raids into Mulhouse, for instance, each followed by a return of the Germans, were visited upon the inhabitants ? There was no lack of informers, both in the streets and in the houses, on the look-out for every kindness shown to the French, and busily drawing up a list of suspects... If due allowance were made in France for the feelings thus engendreed by bitter experience, people would find it much easier to understand that among the peasants, for instance, in such areas as the Dannemarie district, so close behind the lines, there are those who still maintain an ambiguous attitude, inspired by a perfectly justifiable mistrust. « How can one tell, they say to themselves, who will be our masters to-morrow ? » It is but a lingering vestige of the evil German system of having informers everywhere.

Reverting, however, to the subject of Alsatian festivals, let us listen to the words of one more eye-witness. The occasion was July 14th last, celebrated with an even greater measure of enthusiasm and high spirits than in former years. If any doubt were possible, we might turn for confirmation to our new American allies, a number of whom were bidden to that festival and deeply impressed by what they saw.

Yesterday, writes our Alsatian correspondent, on the occasion of the national fête, great rejoicings were held in our town. All kinds of amusements were got up, both for the young and for the elders. A few of

our lads, who three years ago knew not one word of French, gave a two act drama called *Les Francs-Tireurs de Strasbourg*, on an improvised stage under the lime-trees in the Place de l'Administration. At one time, the whole audience struck up the *Marseillaise*. From one end of the town to the other, every house was gay with flags, and so were the poorest cottages, away in the loneliest dales. All this, mark you, was done spontaneously. To those who clamour for a plebiscite about the restitution of Alsace to France, one would have liked to show these demonstrations, especially considering that for the past forty-four years nothing on earth could induce one of our peasants to buy a German flag.

And this is the sober truth. Never did the German authorities have the satisfaction of seeing the Imperial banner hoisted over an Alsatian homestead. Upon this question of emblems — and certain others besides — the Alsatians and Lorrainers have always maintained an uncompromising attitude. Well may those temporary occupiers of the two provinces bethink themselves of the obligatory displays of bunting on State occasions, when the best they could obtain from the people was the flaunting of the Alsatian colours, red and white. If flags were insisted upon, well and good : here was a chance of giving expression to their feelings of protest and independence.

The following was the manner of the Kaiser's reception at Massevaux, a tale the people of the district are fond of telling. In the same town, in the very valley that were the scene of the unanimous demonstrations in favour of the French national fête described above, William II came to inaugurate the Sewen dam and waterworks. A peremptory order had gone forth that flags should be displayed everywhere for the occasion. The people at Massevaux did the strict minimum, they hoisted one Alsatian flag over every roof and shut themselves up in their houses. Not a soul in the streets, not a face at the windows. The Imperial procession passed through a city of slumber. At the same time, people were not unwilling to peep out, even though determined not to be seen themselves. So from behind their half-opened windows they snatched a hasty glance while the procession was still some little distance

away, closing them again as soon as it came near. And thus it happened that from one end of the town to the other, the Kaiser driving rapidly through was greeted at every step by the ironical slamming of shutters !

* * *

We were told, just now of a square called the « Place de l'Administration ». An unfamiliar name, denoting a novel institution that plays an important part in Alsatian life. The reference is to the « military administrative mission » acting in juxtaposition to the army itself, and composed chiefly of officers on the army reserve list, belonging partly to the judiciary, and more particularly to the Council of State. This body we have to thank for what may be called, generally speaking, the success of our administration in Alsace. It is easy to imagine some of the niceties of a problem consisting on the one hand in taking up a succession — the German succession,—and on the other to prepare for the future French regime. The former task demanded consideration for the persons, and observance of the laws. The laws were German. They are still German. Just as in our invaded areas the Germans accept and apply the French law — interpreting these, of course, according to their own spirit — so do we follow the German laws ; but this is where personal considerations intervene ; while adhering to the German laws, we interpret them according to the French spirit. And if our authorities were called upon to exercise plenty of tact, nice judgment and great prudence, in applying the established laws and all general measures of a special character, how much more was this the case in dealing with the public itself and in deciding individual cases ! Their first duty was to provide for the security of the French army, which could only be done by weeding out the population carefully. Immigrants of German origin are easy to detect. There were cases, however, that require more careful handling, people whom it is difficult to remove from their homes, Alsa-

tians whose loyalty may be considered doubtful. After these two classes had been safely disposed of by internment, the authorities found themselves in presence of a population entirely at sea, cut off from their former sources of supply, from all their contractors and from all their contracts and utterly at a loss to find others, unless our administrators came forward as intermediaries. If it was made possible for work to be resumed and for justice to be rendered ; if French Fire Insurance companies were able to pay damages on policies issued by German firms ; if the Alsatian women whose husbands were serving in the German army were not left to their own devices or held in suspicion, but had their separation allowances increased, on the contrary, so as to be less inferior to ours (1) ; if a great many other stumbling blocks were successfully avoided ; and if a good mutual understanding prevails — a sign, after all, of general satisfaction.— the credit for all this must be ascribed to the skill, the sense of justice and the unfailing kindness shown by our administrators. Those administrators, whom I will not mention by name, since they are of opinion that in war-time every French activity should be anonymous, are respected and loved by the population, towards whom they act as guardians and who look to them for protection as well as for government. Their part is made easier for them by reason of their military status, of the stringent and powerful character of an army organism. Incidentally, the army themselves have contributed to the development of the country, in particular by the splendid roads covering by this time several hundreds of miles, which they have made across the mountains and through the forests, amid the most glorious scenery, and which, after serving for the transportation of our troops and of their supplies, will before very long be the delight of tourists.

Take the case of the military Mayor of Thann. He had

(1) The German allowance is 18 marks per month for the wife, and 9 marks per month for each child, while ours, being 1 fr. 50 a day for the wife and 0 fr. 75 for each child, amounts to 67 fr. 50 per month, as against some 35 fr. in Germany,

fought in Alsace at the beginning of the war and had grown very fond of the country. Having sustained a grievous wound — his right arm had to be cut off — he applied for service in the administration of Alsace. A Paris barrister, and now an army captain, he was appointed one day to the mayoralty of Thann, at the request of the inhabitants themselves, who being unable for various reasons to agree upon the choice of an Alsatian mayor, had asked to be given a French military mayor. Captain S. G. carries out his duties to the satisfaction of all concerned. One of the chief members of the town Council, a manufacturer who was Mayor of Thann under the German rule, and subsequently Deputy Mayor, which post he still holds, was saying to me : « We never had so good a mayor at Thann. Our finances were never so prosperous. »

True, the Germans dilapidated those finances unscrupulously.

* * *

It is in relation to the future that all this administrative wisdom acquires its strength. The Germans in occupation of our invaded districts have no hesitation in destroying property, in maltreating the people; in draining the sources of production, to the detriment of the future. Not for them is the future, in France. In Alsace, the future is ours.

In preparing for that future, the language question is one of paramount importance. How well the Germans were aware of this ! And what store the Alsatians set by it ! The little French they still knew was kept up sedulously in every class of society. It is a matter of common knowledge that the bourgeoisie never varied from the practice of speaking French. If you call upon a *curé* in some distant valley, he will tell you that he spoke French even in Latin ; for the clergy could never be prevailed upon to give up the French pronunciation of Latin when officiating, any more than they would stop wearing their French cassocks. If Alsatian priests, like the clergy of all foreign countries, sometimes spoke ill of offi-

cial France in addressing their congregations, it was because official France behaved badly to the Church. But as to the French language, they were frequently alone to speak it and keep it up in the villages. If you call upon a manufacturer, he will say to you :

« We have always conducted our business in French; for forty-four years, except in our relations with the Germans, we have made use of the French language for all our business correspondance ; our very accounts we have cast up in French ; yes indeed, in spite of the difficulties and complications involved; while paying out marks, we reckoned in francs, and our inventories — as you may see for yourself — are made out exactly like those of French firms (1).

Should you enter the homes of the peasants, on the contrary, they will apologise for not speaking French. Maybe one of the daughters speaks our language, having been taught at the school kept by the Sisters. But French was looked upon as a special accomplishment, as something too refined for daily use ; as a luxury, in fact. Now, the knowledge of French is gradually spreading. This is noticeable at church, for instance, from which the people were inclined at first to keep away, because they could not understand the sermons preached in French. In shops, both large and small, the French language is spoken by everybody. Special classes are attended by people of all ages, by tradesmen, by fathers of families. Their deserving efforts, however, are not rewarded by equal success. One needs to be still young or already well educated in other respects, to learn a new language. Complete success can only be attained by children.

Those children of Alsace !

All the time I have been writing, I seemed to see them

(1) According to some of these manufacturers the economic advantage Alsace-Lorraine is supposed to have derived from her connection with the German Empire is a mere myth; as a matter of fact their condition was made as bad as possible, by reason of the envy of the German manufacturers and the determined ostracism to which they were subjected by the government. An informing article was contributed on the subject by a Swiss to the Zurich review « *Wissen und Leben* », October 1st 1917. This article deals with the three sources of wealth in Alsace : agriculture (and especially vineyards), cotton-mills, and mining.

scampering between the lines, as they may be seen out yonder scampering between the houses, and I had to exercise considerable self-restraint to avoid speaking of them before their turn came to be formally introduced, so thoroughly do their young lives embody the very life of Alsace, so unquenchably wells up through their boisterous childhood the robust hope of France, the new-found spring never again to run dry. There are so many of them in Alsace, that you seem to run across them everywhere. In summer, their feet are bare ; in winter they wear wooden clogs ; they all wear a military head-dress, képi, béret, or forage-cap ; many, a complete uniform. Their great delight is to get hold of the badge of some regiment, to which they may then claim to belong. Nor are they unworthy to wear such honourable tokens. They are brave to a fault, very wide-awake, high-spirited withal, and thoroughly reliable.

There once came to Alsace a neutral mission. It was in the days when the Bulgarians were still neutral. A Bulgarian, sidling up to a little girl on the edge of a group that had just been singing a French song, addressed her in a would-be fatherly manner :

« Now tell me, little one, you do not like France, do you ? »

The little maid, who was but eight years old, began by disengaging her ear from the hypocrite's finger, and looking him full in the face, replied :

« Nay, sir, I simply worship her. »

They have delicacy of feeling, moreover, as becomes the issue of a chivalrous race. A certain over-zealous school-teacher having spoken injudiciously of the hatred and contempt in which the Germans should be held, a little girl rushed from the class-room, all in tears. « Teacher says, she sobbed, that one should hate the Germans if one loves France, but my daddy is in the German army, so I cannot love France entirely. »

Some boys are playing in the public square. Suddenly, one of them shouts :

« I've won ! *Vive la France !* »

A painter is in the square, likewise, busily sketching one of the gabled house-fronts, with their many windows, so quaintly characteristic of Alsace. The children, as they do everywhere, crowd round to see the gentleman at work. And one of them makes bold to question him.

— « Do you live in Paris, *Monsieur* ?

— Yes.

— Then, *Monsieur*, you must have met Napoleon in Paris ?

Napoleon is one of their idols, and they will stand round you, begging to be told stories of that mighty leader of men.

In the early days of October last, the third school year opened in Alsace. In 1915, the attendance had been very small ; in 1917, there were 9,000 pupils. The continuation schools, at which, as is the case in Germany, attendance is compulsory until the age of eighteen in some districts, of twenty in others, were attended by 4,000 students. Higher educational courses, preparing pupils for admission to the professional schools, or to qualify for scholarships in the *Lycées*, were instituted last year. There are no charges except for books and other school requisites. The primary certificate (*Certificat d'études primaires*) was won this year, before a board of French examiners, and on precisely the same lines as in France, by 584 candidates, out of 638 who were examined. It must be remembered that these children, three years ago, did not speak a word of French. There had been but 7 candidates in 1915 ; in 1916 the number had risen to 224 ; in 1917, there were 638, the progression, therefore, has been a rapid one.

For the elementary certificate (*Brevet élémentaire*) and admission to the *Ecole Normale d'Instituteurs* at Belfort, there were 16 candidates received this year.

The classes afford a most interesting sight. In the words of a French primary school-master who visited them, « what they have retained of the *Boche* school discipline makes them attentive and tractable pupils. A class of 55 will remain for three hours on end without your having to rebuke a single

child for inattention or for talking. The interest they take in their work, their readiness to understand and to admire, are enough to make any one wish to be a school-master under such conditions. »

Their teachers, who are all first class men, are partly Alsatian school-masters specially chosen for the purpose, partly mobilised French primary school-masters. In all, the schools in Alsace employ 100 male and 117 female teachers (most of the latter being Sisters from Ribeauvillé). Their authority over the pupils is wonderfully quiet. At a mere sign, at a mere word spoken in an undertone, the children rise to their feet, take their seats, or assemble for singing. Their bearing is very different from that of a French class, which is generally more restless and not held so admirably in hand by the master. They were questioned at some length in our presence, at Massieux, at Thann, in a number of villages. They are eager to answer the questions put to them ; out of 30 youngsters at least 20 put up their hands to be allowed to give the required explanations or to recite a piece of poetry, and while the class sits perfectly still, the pupil chosen by the master stands up and answers in a clear, deliberate and earnest manner.

The Alsatian boy rarely gives the impression of being flighty ; rather does he appear self-concentrated and thoughtful, and he is much given to knitting his brows over his long, sharp nose. When you come to examine their physical traits, to try and determine from what race exactly they are sprung, you find them, in the mass, rather different from our children, but very different from German children. You distinguish two fairly clear-cut types among their somewhat undefined or extremely varied features, and the more prevalent is not, as might be supposed, the blonde type with a big round head-piece, but the dark type with a long narrow head, sparkling black eyes, thin lips and a pointed chin. Their eagerness to learn and to know French is remarkable. Strangely enough, though their orderly bearing and outward discipline reflect some credit upon the German educational system, there is another side to the

question, and in the legacy left by their German masters there are many objectionable features, as for instance an incredible propensity to tell tales of each other, which it was found very hard to eradicate. Again, it was high time to stimulate these youngsters, who were beginning to grow stiff and awkward, and to lose their youthful individuality under the harsh rule of a master who caned them ; all those who took them in hand at the beginning of the war agree in declaring that these children now so lively and so natural, were quite dull when first their new masters began to teach them.

Their French stock of words is already extensive and well chosen, though picturesquely disfigured at times by the slang picked up at home from the soldiers ; their intonation is somewhat harsh and accentuated, their voice guttural ; these defects they long to amend. Need I add how pathetic are their earnest endeavours in this direction ? They are there before us, as soft and malleable as potter's clay, to be fashioned as we please ; and this human clay, that no man may handle who has not first obtained its free consent, thrills through and through with childish trusting faith. France is being drawn up into their very blood day by day, and hour by hour ; in her they find their nourishment, and it is through her, with her, that their being is developed. At certain times, the sight of these earnest youngsters with the generous French blood flowing in their frail bodies, becomes irresistibly moving. The hardest sceptic cannot hear without emotion a young Alsatian child recite that poem in which the question as to whether France or Germany is the real fatherland is so unanswerably decided ; or a whole class, gathered round the master, sing an exquisitely sweet and tuneful canon to which have been set Victor Hugo's stirring lines :

« Ceux qui, pieusement, sont morts pour la patrie...

A few days ago, in early October, an amateur performance of the play *Les Oberlés* was given at Thann by some civilians and gunners. Everybody came to see it, authorities, officers,

people of the town and of the neighbourhood, children and soldiers. And the finest part of the show was certainly not provided by the actors, it was the awe-struck admiration of the Alsatian youngsters... At the very same moment, a raid was being carried out at Vieux-Thann, some two miles from the club-room where the play was given, and while guns were booming in the distance and shells whining over the roof tops broke in repeatedly upon the patriotic utterances on the stage, the motionless children, unmindful of sounds for which long familiarity had bred contempt, listened with rapture to the tale of how Jean Oberlé was true to France.

A GLIMPSE ACROSS THE LINES

Across the lines, there are first the soldiers. It is well known that Alsatians are rarely sent to fight on the Western front. They are only kept there, we are informed by a recent document, if the captain of the company vouches for them in person. This, however, the German officers themselves declare to be quite exceptional. « I heard one of them say », writes a man, « that at least 85 per cent of the soldiers from Alsace and Lorraine are more than half Frenchmen, that the remainder are doubtful, but that not one is to be trusted ». That this last statement does not lack reality is borne out by the following minor incident, to say nothing of so many far more serious cases, that can only be made known at some future time.

« I have left no stone unturned to avoid fighting against the French, an Alsatian soldier writes to his family, eventually refusing to serve in the front lines, for which I was put in prison. Then they made me serve on the lines of communication as a telephone operator. One day I was given a message to send in to the Oberkommando, stating that some French Officers had escaped from an internment camp. You may be sure that message was never sent! »

Do you know how many Alsatian officers we had in the French army in 1914? Three thousand.

And do you know how many there were in the German army? Three.

We are told that conditions are no different now, and Alsatians who are proposed for commissions refuse that « honour ».

« Everywhere Alsatian soldiers are restive and almost provocative. There are many of us Alsatians in the regiments here (Prussia), writes a soldier, and their moral is for the most part excellent. They frater-

nise with the Poles and have an undeniable ascendancy over their Prussian comrades. In April a train-load of Alsatians, weeded out from the units on the western front arrived here. On every carriage was chalked up in large letters the inscription « *Vive la France ! A bas la Prusse !* » On one occasion, in May, a whole procession of Alsatians and Poles — there were 300 of them, at least — marched through the town singing the *Marseillaise !* Cases of desertion on the part of Alsatians at the Russian front having become more and more frequent, most of our fellows are now sent to Macedonia. »

From another :

“ The last train returning from the Russian front reached Mulhouse amid shouts of « *Vive la France !* » which are likewise heard in the streets of the town. There would be too much to do, so no one is punished and the police have given up interfering. »

So we can detect the Alsatian element making its presence felt throughout the German army. Here and there, in the heavy German dough, young lads who have not renounced their freedom of thought blow up a bubble of rebellion, resistance and scorn. As far as can be judged from reliable information, they are extraordinarily bold. As soon as there are a few of them gathered together, they promptly overawe the others. Though of more passive temperament, the Lorrainers remain equally unassimilated. To one and all, the war seems to have brought enlightenment upon a number of points, notably an unmistakable explanation of their own state of feeling. Some call their distemper by the name of France, others of Alsace : they are brought together by a like insolubility in the German element. The very furnace of war, and the cementing process of blood shed in common, have failed to weld them into the German metal. They remain definitely refractory.

* *

Behind them, the Alsatian population — some million and a half, all told, in the towns and villages — suffer greatly. We know part of the truth, enough to enable us to gauge the rest, by what leaks out to the French part of the country from what is still German, through the medium of soldiers who desert or

are made prisoners ; of certain letters that come through ; or by word of mouth from Alsatian civilians who have taken refuge in Switzerland ; by some one of the hundred ways, in short, by which people manage to make their voices heard, in spite of the most rigorous constraint. Close indeed must be the meshes of a net, if it is to prevent the spreading of news among men !

Besides what the Alsatian and Lorrainers contrive to tell us about themselves, there is much information to be gleaned from the official German Press. Lists of deserters, lists of people summoned before the Courts, lists of sentences passed, lists of sequestrations, enable us to measure, week by week, the progress of the anti-German feeling among the population, by the mere tale of the reprisals visited upon them. The « Courts-martial Extraordinary » recite the motives for the infliction of terms of imprisonment, or fines — an unimpeachable and accurate testimony. Imprisonment, with or without a fine, is the key-note. The great prison at Mulhouse has been facetiously called the *Hotel de France* by the natives, and it appears that the name has been extended to every jail in Alsace and Lorraine. So many people are sentenced to one month or to three months' imprisonment that there is no room for all : they have to await their turn to be locked up : It is sometimes several months before persons under sentence can serve their time. The misdemeanour, under varied and more or less serious aspects, is ever the same : « manifestation of anti-German sentiments. » True it is called by another name, that makes it less offensive to the pride of the authorities. Under the pretext that the numerous troops quartered among the population of Alsace and Lorraine « must not be wounded in their feelings of patriotism » the display of « French sentiments » is dubbed « provocation ». It is of course no easy matter to determine just where such an act begins or ends. Your German, who is both arrogant and suspicious is ever ready to take offence. To speak French in public, to hand a packet of cigarettes to a French prisoner, to shout a word of greeting

to those that are marched through the streets, are so many acts of provocation, and are punished as such by three, ten, or fifteen days' imprisonment and a fine. There are people of all classes in the Alsatian jails : bourgeois, manufacturers, inn-keepers, peasants, priests, workmen and young girls with even a sprinkling of « good Sisters ». The worthy nuns of the great popular orders of Alsace, the teaching Sisters of Ribeauvillé, the nursing Sisters of Niederbronn, the Daughters of Charity belonging to the Alsatian branch. Any pretext is good enough to justify a prosecution. A nurse is alleged to have tended the French wounded better than the German ; another woman, to have said that the number of prisoners the Germans claim to have taken is always exaggerated ; two people, riding in a tramway « spoke French ostensibly and in a manner calculated to give offence » — a young lady took her dog with her into a church where a patriotic service was being held — E. F. of Metz, who had, when on a journey by rail between Hagondange and Uckange, indulged in certain anti-German remarks, has been sentenced to a fine of 1.000 marks (Court-martial extraordinary held at Thionville, August 26th 1917). Informers, who are in the German educational system what spies are in her politics, are to be met with at every turn ; a deputy stated in the Reichstag that in the open Court, a tavern waitress boasted of having, as a representative of the Pangermanist Committee of Strasbourg, brought about the arrest of 128 people (1) « A man needs to keep sharp watch upon his tongue, for the least word that is not consonant with Prussian ideas is sufficient to send him to prison » writes a civilian who, unable to stand such treatment any longer, had gone to settle in Switzerland. M. F. was dismissed the public service and put in prison for saying : « If they have no money left, the only thing for them to do is to end the war ». A month ago sixty girls escaped to Switzerland. One of them came on to this place

(1) Sitting of the Reichstag October 30th 1916. Interpellation by deputy Hauss, of the Alsatian Centre, concerning the arbitrary arrests made in Alsace-Lorraine.

(Délémont) She too, tells how dreary every thing is in their poor country.

Three peasants of Boofzheim made bold to read some manifestoes dropped by French aviators. They did, indeed, hand them over to the mayor, as prescribed ; but only after reading them. A fine of 100 marks was inflicted for this piece of indiscretion.

A kitchen-maid at Colmar is accused of having sung an « anti-German song » while washing up her dishes ; a fine of 30 marks is inflicted upon her.

The official paymaster at Ferrette is discharged at a moment's notice and deprived of four-fifths of the pension to which he is legally entitled, for having « manifested anti-German sentiments. »

By last spring the days and months of imprisonment inflicted upon Alsatians and Lorrainers reached the stupendous total of 4000 years.

What is to be found in these German documents, is not so much a fresh proof of the barbarous methods of Teutonic rule, as an authentic demonstration of the feelings thus repressed.

And apart from fines, imprisonment and the brutal dismissal of petty officials there are other punishments, such as detention as a suspected person and the prohibition to live in Alsace. People of Alsace-Lorraine are deported to Germany and cannot return to their homes. The case has even been told of a deputy, M. Lévêque, representing the Sarrebourg-Chateau-Salins ward, who was interned in Pomerania by order and could come to Berlin, for the purpose of attending the debates in the Reichstag, only under strict police supervision. On December 1st 1916, even after measure of general amnesty and liberation had been decreed, there were still in the various German States no fewer than 695 people exiled from their homes. Moreover, the conciliatory measures decided upon in high places as a matter of good policy, are not always carried into effect by the local, but by the

military authorities, who seem to be possessed of a perfect hatred for the Alsatians and Lorrainers. For not the Kreis-directors, indeed, are responsible for seeing those measures carried into effect, but the General commanding the district, martial law having been declared in Alsace and Lorraine since the beginning of the war.

Some prosecutions are of a more complex character than the street incidents we have mentioned. The teachers in the girls' schools attended by the daughters of the Alsatian gentry are interfered with and prosecuted at every turn; a course the civilian authorities had never ventured to pursue during the forty-four years of the German occupation. Informations have been lodged against them as constituting an intolerable centre of French light and learning. The military Governor of Ribeauvillé institutes proceedings against the teaching Sisters for opinions « contrary to the public interest ». His attention has been called to the fact that their educational methods are purely French, that they encourage and foster French sentiments in the pupils committed to their charge, and cherish such sentiments themselves. One of the Sisters is sentenced to nine months' imprisonment, another to three. The higher Staff have been superseded by women of more « Germanophile » sentiments.

The headmaster of the large seminary at Strasbourg, secretary to the Bishop, Monsignor Frietzen (the only German, by the way, whom the Alsatians profess not to hate), was sent to prison for similar motives, and released only at the personal request of the King of Saxony.

The great influence of the clergy in Alsace and Lorraine, two deeply religious provinces, is notorious. They are respected, venerated, obeyed. They are people of importance, each in his own parish. In August 1917, there were forty of them in the Alsatian prisons.

What is the result of all these vexations? What moral do they point? Whither do they lead?

As any but a German government would have foreseen

from the first, the result has been to strengthen both the feelings of wrathful spite against Germany, and the feelings of loyalty and trust towards France.

How could it be otherwise? The outbreak of hostilities a very trumpet call for these people who no longer looked forward to a war for their deliverance, who perchance were trying to forget, suddenly roused the hereditary instincts of such as had deliberately suppressed them, while giving others an opportunity of expressing openly the ardent feelings they had hitherto dissembled. The explosion was so violent as to amaze and dishearten the Germans.

So this, they said to themselves, is the result of forty years of Germanisation! These Lorrainers, and even the Alsatians whom we looked upon as being nearer to ourselves, are as intoxicated with Gallic frenzy as they were when we first clasped them to the steel-girt bosom of the great German fatherland! yet they have been brought up according to German ideas! Our schools, our money, our police, our culture, our Universities and our persecutions, all our benefits, our trade, our army, our supervision, our might... and our charm: all, all have been in vain!

But let us listen to their own words:

During those memorable days of August 1914, when Germany was stirred to her depths by deep enthusiasm, it might have been assumed that so powerful a movement would not have stopped short at the Alsatian borders, that the surging tide would have swept up to the very top of the Vosges. But truth compels us to admit that the observations registered do not bear out this assumption. True, it was not to be expected that the Alsatians and Lorrainers would be in perfect unison with the rest of the German races; but it might at least have been possible to admit that in the presence of a common danger and of practically identical interests, every discordant note would have been drowned in a fervid manifestation of solidarity.

Instead of this, what do we see? A sullen and disintegrating spirit of disparagement, deliberately ignoring the mighty upheaval whereby every individual member of the German nation is uplifted. We may even desire I know not what secret leaning towards our Western enemy! (1).

The war drags on without bringing about a solution, and

(1) Dr Petri, late Under-Secretary of Justice at Strasbourg :
« Of the interior Peace of the German People ».

the attitude of the Alsatians and Lorrainers remains the same. As the Germans themselves are forced to admit, they lay the responsibility at Germany's door, nor do they believe implicitly in the ultimate German triumph. Therefore, with logical human consistency, they add to their former grievances all the grievances of the present time. The sufferings, the privations, the destitution of the country, the intolerable burden of war : all these they ascribe to Germany's fell decision. Small wonder, then if they can no longer bear with a Government that has always been a stranger to them, that is now hostile to the point of actual and short-sighted cruelty, and which, moreover, they look upon as responsible for all the evils by which they are beset in consequence of the war !

A woman writes to her sister, who is in French Alsace : « It appears you are in the seventh heaven ! How I long to be there with you ! »

A priest receives permission to go abroad on private business. One of his brother ministers, a *curé* in France, informs me that as soon as he arrived he sat down and wrote to him. His letter was one long lament ! And at the end he added. « Dear brother, I must tell you that if the French were to come over now, they would be received on bended knees ! People would cast down their very clothes for them to tread upon ! »

This priest, whose name it were not safe to disclose, is not a callow youth nor a visionary. He is a man of wisdom and experience.

A boy writes in a more sober strain, but with charming spirit : « In our villages, apart from a few fellows who have no judgment, we are all French here. »

Yet in spite of her sturdy common-sense, a measure of the old romantic spirit still survives, here and there, in Alsace, as witness the following incident that was related a few weeks ago by a girl, when informing a former school-mistress of the death of her uncle, which she described with artless simplicity.

Her uncle had fought the Germans in 1870 ; feeling himself to be very ill indeed, he thought he would ~~like to~~ die with

his French képi on his head. He therefore requested his wife to bring him that old trophy from the wardrobe where it had lain secreted. And having put it on, he said :

— Now I should like you to fetch me Jean-Louis.

Jean-Louis was an old fellow-soldier, who had likewise been in the last war ;

When Jean-Louis came to his bed-side, the old man said to him :

— Look here, I am feeling very low, and I know I cannot last much longer. The only thing that worries me is that when the French come back, I shall not be there to see it. Now I want you to promise you will do what I ask you, so that I may die with an easy mind. When I am buried, mark the place in the cemetery. Then, as soon as ever the soldiers of France march into Mulhouse, you will come to my grave, dig a hole right down to my body and shout to me : « They have come ! »

We shall hear, no doubt, ever fewer and fewer of these moving echoes. Letters from Alsace under the yoke are getting more and more scarce. They have never been free from restraint : they are read a first time at the office where they were posted, and again at the Swiss frontier ; it is impossible for the senders to speak their minds. In small matters, indeed, it is possible to deceive the Germans. For instance, when a man writes : « All is well here, we have everything we need, and food is so plentiful that I am as fat as... Peter Merckling », there is no reason why the German censor should know that Peter Merckling is the very leanest man in the whole parish, « a fellow, I was informed by the recipient of the letter, whose waist would hold in your two hands ». But matters of importance cannot be explained, and we have to search the public official German documents to get some idea of the hardships endured by our kin beyond the border, and to realise that if they are treated so harshly it is because their hearts are ours more thoroughly than ever.

The Germans themselves are beginning to see this. They

attribute such faithful attachment in great part to the influence of the Alsatian women, and no more handsome tribute could be paid to the latter. An anonymous writer in the *Strassburger Post*, May 15th 1916, lamenting the fact that the fond hopes of a good « German Alsatian » are taking so long to materialise, declares that a strenuous effort must be made to win over the Alsatian girls to Germany.

The younger men, those in whom our future rests, are now in a proper frame of mind ; it is to be hoped that the turmoil of the battle-field will make good Germans of them more quickly and more surely than all the fine speeches and arguments we could have pressed upon them here. Well, let us see to it that this good seed is not destroyed by the womenfolk when our men come home. For it is especially the women that are varnished with French polish. Before the war, it was observed frequently that the husband's friendly feelings towards Germany — feelings acquired in the German schools and in the German barracks — were overmastered by the « gallicising » proclivities of his wife. In any case, it is necessary that the daughters shall not continue to be like their mothers, or for many a long year we shall have no rest. The Alsatian women have reacted upon their husbands and their children in such a manner that in them even German culture was soon dominated and stifled by a so-called Franco-Alsatian culture : love for our literature and for our history, an intelligent understanding of the civilisation and the effort of our nation have not been proof against the airs and graces of the Alsatian woman. The German virtues have sickened and withered in the atmosphere of marriage, when indeed they have not perished out and out. »

However this may be, the Reichstag at least, if not the Governor and the military chiefs, perceived that a regime of dictatorship and persecutions could only establish in the eyes of the whole world the very fact brought home to us irresistibly by the few examples we have mentioned, namely that the « myth » according to which Lorraine and Alsace are French might very well prove to be the sober truth. Many violent debates were held in Parliament on the subject. Deputies belonging to the Alsatian Centre, to the German Centre, and to the Socialist Party, attacked the Chancellor and the Minister for War with the utmost virulence, in relation to their policy in the Reichsland, as witness the following diatribe by the Imperialist-Socialist deputy Hermann Wendel, in the

cou^e of his interpellation before the Reichstag on March 23rd 1917. This fierce admirer of Bismarck and rule by the iron rod delivered himself as follows :

If some day the Alsatians and Lorrainers are able to tell what has been their fate, a shout of indignation will ring through the world. A régime of inconceivable harshness is persistently applied to them. Every effort to awaken in them feelings of friendliness to Germany is thus nullified. It would be much harder now than in 1871 to win the hearts of the population of Alsace-Lorraine. How bad the state of affairs now is in the Reichsland is best shown by the fact that the highest official of Alsace-Lorraine, the Prefect of Metz Von Gemmingen, has given vent to his indignation by declaring that : « the system now prevailing in Alsace-Lorraine is sheer barbarity. »

Is it not too late, as the Reichstag would fain believe, to win back these alienated hearts ? We may hope, at least, that a little more kindness and humanity will render somewhat less bitter the lot of the population for whom we are concerned. The *Kölnische Volkszeitung* struck a note of warning in 1916, when it stated that there was no room for further blunders, for the evil was deep-rooted.

The population of Alsace-Lorraine, especially in the towns, will have none of our German culture ; it refuses to think, it refuses to feel, it refuses to will, after the German fashion... at the present time Alsace-Lorraine is not a German country. The evidence derived from the language and the race is not, indeed, absolutely conclusive. Language and race are but conditions facilitating and justifying the adaptation and assimilation of one culture to another, but they are not determining factors... To be Alsatian is, in the opinion of the masses, to be precisely something else than German (1).

How noble and admirably bold is the attitude of such a population which, in the very midst of war, compels its masters to such admissions ! And we know that these stout hearts are not to be dismayed, that Germany's most bitter grievance is to be unable to root out the belief that is in them, that France will gain the victory. All the German threats, all the persuasive arguments of a Press skilled in guiding public op-

(1) *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, March 8th and 9th 1916. Needless to emphasise the contrast between these words and those at the beginning of the present article.

nion in its own country, do not avail to make these faithful souls lose their hope and trust in the future.

We have doubted Alsace, of this there can be no question. Many of us, who live in ignorance of her present life, dare not believe, even now, in the faith that binds her to France. Yet on either side of the line of trenches whereby she is still divided, countless incidents, facts and visions are recorded, showing her to us united in that common faith that lifts her, so to speak, far above the stormy seas of battle, to the serene atmosphere of an assured and very definite hope. And realising that the country and the people are ours, never ceased to be ours in a subconscious way for forty-four years and more, we are filled with gratitude and relief at finding them so unswervingly loyal.

Nor is there any reason to disguise such feelings of relief and gratitude. It is a matter of vital importance to us that this land, wrested from France, persistently refused to become German, that our political claims are borne out and supported by claims of humanity. Had we from the first — especially those of us who did not witness the great wrong committed in 1871 — thought of these districts snatched as spoils by the victors, as being not « Alsace-Lorraine », an inaccurate geographical denomination, but five French departments, similar in all respects to our other departments, and as much part and parcel of France as the rest, we should find it less difficult to understand the lasting resentment of these populations robbed of their true nationality. Their blood was French blood. The French soul was their soul. The powerful unity of France consists in the close unity of her several parts ; the history of her formation is that of a process of agglomeration as slow and sure as nature's own, round a bright nucleus of irresistible attractive power.

Are we to believe, then, that the Alsatians and Lorrainers were obsessed by their love of France? Such an assertion, methinks, would be fanciful and misleading. If a select few among them were haunted by such a love, the masses, no doubt,

as is only natural, made the best of existing conditions ; to them the thought of their former country was a memory, a pleasant memory, all the more beautiful because so very different from the present. But the fact is obvious, neither Lorrainers nor Alsatians could ever abide Germany. From the first year to the last, except for the « ralliés » mentioned above, who were a small minority looked upon as renegades by the rest and treated accordingly, it may safely be asserted that the German rule overlay the conquered population without ever striking root among them ; that all the alien elements it brought into the country, whether culture, institutions, or persons, lived side by side with the native elements, without ever being able to penetrate deeper or to mingle with them. This juxtaposition never resulted in anything like fusion : and if the Germans were sufficiently clear-sighted to realise that « the annexed territories remained a foreign body » in the German empire, as they themselves say, the annexed populations, for their part, did not cease to nourish an antipathy to the surroundings in which they were condemned to live. When we get to know fully, year by year, the mutual relations of two countries thus compelled to live under the same roof, like an ill-assorted couple, the tale will be that of a persistent effort on the part of Germany to break down the stubborn resistance of Alsace-Lorraine, to master her reluctant soul, first by acts of brutality and despotism, then by cajoling advances and coarse flattery, to each of which moods Alsace opposed an equally determined aversion. Among the peasants, indifference may have been at the root of this attitude ; a man may be content to forget who it is that is his master, when he has his fields to attend to, and the only German with whom he is brought into contact is the tax-collector once a twelvemonth ; by those higher up in the social scale, the Germans were ignored systematically, the separation was complete. It is no unusual thing for a young woman brought up in Strasburg, an important garrison town, to inform you that she has never been able so much as to make out the respec-

tive ranks of the German officers. *She did not even trouble to look at them.* A prominent *curé* at Mulhouse will tell you he has never had any dealings with the military chaplain, who is naturally a German. Even the Church, and a common religion, did not avail to bring together these irreconcilable elements. Higher yet, among the élite of Alsace and Lorraine, downright hatred was engendered by the consciousness of the evil effects upon the race by German influence.

We may therefore be fairly confident — provided the French government understand only half as well as Louis XIV that this is not a race to be coerced or bullied — that the difficulties some people apprehend in connection with the return to the mothercountry of these five departments will be comparatively easy to overcome, because on the whole the Alsatians and Lorrainers are desirous of a return to France pure and simple, without conditions of any sort, but with all that may be implied by that return in the way of burdens, obligations and duties.

What, then, if this sturdy intelligent race which discerned before any other the inferiority of its temporary master, and while crediting him with certain qualities all insufficient to compel respect, grew to look upon him more, and more as he knew him better, with absolute hatred and loathing?

That race, in the opinion of those best qualified to form an opinion, is of such a character that even if this rich land should be restored to France as ruthlessly plundered and devastated as were our lands in the Ainse or in the Oise, she would still prove a source of wealth by reason of the personal worth of her inhabitants. If the Lorrainers are of the best and purest French stock, the Alsatians on the other hand, in their more enclosed country, appear to be of a more peculiar disposition, of a type apart, independent of each of the two races that have acted upon them. The Alsatian is headstrong, clear-sighted, practical, tenacious, high-strung and methodical. But whereas he finds nothing conducive to his improvement in

what Germany can hold out to him, he recognises and seeks his complement in the French individuality; for what is lacking in him of refinement, of intellectuality, and of aptitude for enjoying life, he wishes France to supply. Between Germany and France, his choice has been made once for all. It may very well be that the exercise of free choice is the highest prerogative of man. Of this faculty the Alsatians and Lorrainers were possessed, and they have stood by their choice with an obstinacy that was at times dramatic. Not that during all those years they failed to recognise and turn to advantage the manifold resources of Germany. People are to be found in Alsace-Lorraine who have assimilated all that was assimilable in germanism, and who can hand on the better part of it to us, for our profit. In this matter, they will have acted as a sieve and a filter. They will also serve as a counterpoise to the impulsive Southern disposition whereby the normal balance of France was disturbed, and their matter-of-fact sturdiness will come to the support of our Northern populations, to whom they bear a certain likeness. And we? Shall we not see to it that no disappointment is allowed to mar the realisation of their dreams? Just as every French household, should it be privileged when peace comes at last, to witness the return of him who was called away to face the hardships of war, will array itself in its best against that happy event, shall not we also find, in the thought of the home-coming of these sons of France after so many years, a further incentive to live up to their expectations? When the first-born son of the family comes back from a long journey, his mind filled with the experiences and strange sights he has encountered in foreign lands, his glance dwells lingeringly upon the familiar home to which his thoughts have reverted so often... And lo! the light of early dawn rests already upon the top of the road by which our young men will soon be returning to us with firm and assured step.

E. SAINTE-MARIE PERRIN.